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The Sociology of Army Reserves: An Organizational Assessment

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This report outlines the ways in which conventional military sociology is inappropriate for an understanding of reserve components. Issues include potential for using "professional reservists" on a part-time basis, alleviating unit pressures on reservists with demanding civilian careers, reconstituting military schools to accommodate time demands of reservists, feasibility of "buying-out" superannuated personnel to foster early retirements, and the utility of wargaming computers to aid training in interechelon and interunit coordination.

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THE SOCIOLOGY OF ARMY RESERVES: AN ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Heretofore the sociology of the military has been, in effect, the sociology of active-duty forces. This report outlines the ways in which conventional military sociology is inappropriate for an understanding of reserve components. The referent is the Selected Reserves of the U.S. Army, that is, the National Guard and the Reserves. The basic methodology consists of in-depth interviews with reservists and participant observations of reserve units in annual training and weekend drill meetings.

Contrasted with the active-duty force, the military social organization of reserve units has the following characteristics: (1) one-fifth the training time, (2) geographical dispersion of units, (3) recruitment equally from prior-service and nonprior service personnel, (4) stronger recruitment appeal of educational incentives, (5) higher attrition rate, (6) strong civilian employer conflict, (7) family conflict heightens with seniority, (8) little networking among military spouses, (9) ambiguous and difficult to implement career development, and (10) the central role of full-time auxiliary members for unit performance.

Researchable issues include (1) potentiality for using "professional reservists" on a part-time basis, (2) alleviating unit pressures on reservists with demanding civilian careers, (3) reconstituting military schools to accommodate the time demands of reservists, (4) feasibility of "buying-out" superannuated personnel to foster early retirements, and (5) the utility of wargaming computers to aid training in interechelon and interunit coordination.

The dominant organizational trend within Army reserve components is being increasingly held to training standards equivalent to those of active components. The core underlying problem is that this bedrock fact is not well understood in the society at large, and not all that well by the active force either. In brief, the sociology of the reserves is a subject that should be approached on its own terms.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF ARMY RESERVES:
AN ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

What is termed the sociology of the military is, in effect, the sociology of active-duty forces. Reserve forces have rarely been the object of conceptual analyses, and, until very recently of not much more empirical research. <1> The underlying assumption of this research project is that the sociology of the reserves is worthy of attention in it own right for both social scientific and policy reasons. The research goal is to determine the conditions that define the sociology (including social psychology) of the reserves and that separate it from the sociology of the active force.

This report represents the completion of the second part of a broader three-part study of reserve forces. Presented herein is an organizational assessment of reserve components. The focus is on the Selected Reserves in the U.S. Army. That is with the Army Reserves and the Army National Guard. When referring to the Reserves and the Guard collectively, they will be termed, following conventional usage, as reserve components or reserve forces (in lower case letters).

This report breaks new ground by offering a conceptual overview of reserve components as more than just an organizational variation of active components. This is done in

two ways. First and primarily, I present an analysis based on interviews with reservists and observations of reserve units in training. This allows for a conceptual typology of variables that distinguishes between the sociology of active-duty forces and a sociology of reserve forces. Second, I suggest in a provisional manner some of the ways basic research on reserve components has implications for policy.

The resarch methodology is based on extensive site visits to reserve units in annual field training and units in weekend drill training during 1987. All told, some dozen units were visited, and about seventy reservists ranging from private to colonel were personally interviewed. In many cases, moreover, repeated conservations were held with the same individuals over a period of days. The observed units and interviewed reservists represented the gamut from combat to combat support roles. The reserve units observed and the reservists interviewed remain unidentified in order to protect confidentiality.

The Social Context of Reserve Components

Reserve components are increasingly held to training standards equivalent of those of active components. This is the bedrock fact of organizational trends within Army reserve components. Indeed, those serving in the Selected Reserve are no longer "reservists" in the conventional sense, but actualy

augmentees who will serve side by side with active components in the event of mobilization. Two corollaries follow from this master trend. One is that career members of reserve components are being required to devote unprecedented overtime -- some compensated, some donated, all voluntary -- to their units. The other is that for most reservists, normative commitments far outweigh monetary commitments, and indeed such normative commitments may in fact exceed those found in active components.

To view reserve duty principally as a "moonlighting" occupational behavior, as is common in much of the extant research, is to miss the basic point of reserve service. <2> Indeed all straight-forward appplicaitons of the moonlighting theory of occupational choice have found only a small relationship between primary-job characteristics and reserve recruitment and retention. <3> The general consenus in the econometric literature is that the "reserve reenlistment decision is more complex thn the simple decision suggested by moonighting labor theory and that certain assumptions inherent in moonighting labor theory may hold only weakly for reservists." <4> Moreover, "reserve pay elasticity is much lower than similar elasticities measured for civlian moonlighting." <5>

In point of fact, participation in reserve units ought be distinguished from civilian moonighting in several important ways. First, duty hours of reservists are quite different from that of the typical moonlighting job. Second, reservists can be

called onto active duty in a national (or sometimes local) emergency. Third, career reservists receive important retirement benefits rarely found in civilian moonlighting employment. Fourth, reserve summer training conflicts with normal vacation time. <6> These factors bring into question the whole moonlighting concept of reserve forces. Studies are quite clear that the key variables, by far and away, in reserve retention are not directly related to economic costs and benefits, but arise from reserve-duty conflicts with civilian employer and familial priorities. <7>

Before turning more directly to the research findings a prefatory note is in order on some of the most obvious differences between reserve forces and active forces. These fall into two general categories: available training time and geographical dispersion.

Reserve components are offically allocated 39 days per year for training, normally two weeks of annual training and one drill weekend each month in a local armory/reserve center. The actual amount of effective training time is often less owing to unit formations, administrative chores, and travel time between armories/reserve centers and external training sites. The best analysis is that reserve components have approximately one-fifth of the training time of active components. <8>.

There are also important spatial difference between reserve and active units. In the active Army the typical unit

(company/detachment) headquarters is within walking distance and most soldiers live in or close to their units. In reserve components, the average distance to the unit's headquarters is 105 miles and many reservists must commute several hours to reach their units. Dispersion is reflected in another way. Whereas most active duty units are within ten miles or their major training areas, reserve units on the average must travel 150 miles to reach such sites. <9>

Recruitment, Retention, and Attrition. The findings reported from henceforth are based on data personally collected during interviews with reservists and observations of reserve units. At the recruits level, an important distinction is between those with prior-service (PS) in the active force and those who entere the reserve with non-prior service (NPS). For the younger enlisted people, especially NPS, the major stated reason to enlist was educational benefits. (Educational benefits also seemed to be a socially acceptable reason for joining the reserves even for those who probably would not be going on to college.) Other motives for entering the reserves, in somewhat of a descending order of importance, are: (1) a chance to do something different for both PS and NPS, (2) extra money, for both PS and NPS, (3) influence of family members especially for NPS, and (4) for NPS using the reserves as a trial period before entering the active force. Underlying all these motives is a latent patriotism. Junior enlisted members are not as vocal

about service to country as career members, however. But as one put it: "The patriotism has to be there first even if we don't talk about it too much."

The "dual-market" understanding of active force recruitment holds that there are essentially two types of recruits -- employment oriented versus education oriented. Although the former makes up the larger group, the latter brings into the military a high quality recruit attracted by post-service educational benefits and short enlistments. The dual-market exists in reserve forces, but the relative numbers seem to be reversed. Those attracted by educational benefits are the larger group, while those who may be more economically movtivated are the minority.

If educational benefits are general recruitment incentives in reserve components, they are especially effective incentives for National Guard units in states that offer special educational benefits for Guard members. One of the most generous programs is found in Ohio where every Guard member receives full tuition and fees at any public institution of higher learning in the state. Although exact figures are not available, I would estimate upwards of half of all recruits in the Ohio Guard were brought in by the tuition aid program. In point of fact, the Ohio Guard (as would be true in other states with similar tuition programs) has a significant recruitment advantage over the Army Reserve (though, a counterbalancing factor, is that entry into the Guard

more likely involves a combat arms assignment). In any event, the influx of bright and self-disciplined soldiers attracted into the Ohio Guard by the tuition-aid program was said by many officers and NCOs to allow for more training to be accomplished in a shorter time than was previously possible.

A subcategory among young recruits in the reserve components are those who see reserve duty as a way station to an officer's commission. This group was almost entirely drawn from those with prior-service entrants. A typical route is to take part in a Simultaneous Membership Program (SMP) in an ROTC unit in a college near home. When one adds together various post-service education benefits acquired on active duty (Army College Fund and GI Bill), the $100 monthly ROTC allotment, E-5 pay for drills, plus state tuition programs, the total educational benefits can be quite considerable for a person enrolled in a SMP.

For career personnel, reasons for staying in the reserves are twofold. At a certain point, retirement benefits become a key incentive. But not to be underemphasized is the attraction of having an added non-civilian and non-routine dimension to one's life: the camaraderie of the unit, the outdoor life of annual training, the challenge fo leading young people, and a way of breaking the monotony of family life. Also, patriotic and service-to-country motives are openly and frequently expressed by career members of the reserves.

Attrition (defined as leaving before the completion of the

six-year initial reserve obligation) is a problem in the reserves. The best estimates are that only one in five reservists completes the initial six-year obligation. A large part of this attrition, to be sure, is simply caused by people moving out of the home area of the unit, a process about which little can be done in a mobile society. But the survey data is also clear that dissatisfaction in reserve units is much higher than in active units. Indeed, the number expressing "great dissastisfaction" with reserve duty is three time larger (22 percent) than that reported for the active-duty experience (7 percent). <10>

Leaving aside the attrition caused by geographical movement, I could discern the following categories of attritees. One group (mainly NPS) consists of those who we e initially attracted to reserve components almost solely for the extra money. Once they find reserve duty has real demands, indeed increasing demands under the Total Force concept, they quickly drop out. Another group (also mainly NPS) is made up of those who seem unable to finish anything unless closely supervized (as they were in active-duty training). A third group (both FS and NPS) are those who fail to find a home in their reserve units, either because the training is boring or because they somehow fall between the cracks in the informal social organization of the unit. Anti-attrition efforts probaby ought best be concentrated on this latter group.

The Double Bind of Career Advancement. By law each reservist is obligated for 39 days of duty. In actuality, much more time is required from the staff, especially at E-6 (staff sergeant) and above in the NCO corps and O-3 (captain) and above in the officer corps. This fundamental organizational fact is the dominant feature of career membership in the reserves. (One informed estimate is that the average officer spend 70 days a year on reserve duty.)

These extra demands take the form of administrative duties, military schools, workshops, Capstone conferences, overseas training deployment, and so forth. Some of these extra time demands are compensated for through various supplementary pay procedures: Additional Training Assemblies (ATA), Readiness Management Assemblies (RMA), and Additional Drill Assemblies Program (ADAP). But the reality is that much of the overtime is simply voluntary.

The overarching development to make the reserves comparable with active components shows up in career development, often with intractable problems. Among NCOs the demands of career development are most pressing in the need to take military courses required for MOS change and promotion eligibility. The clear trend is to make reservists take courses in active-component schools. For officers, the move toward reserve/active comparability is even more striking. Schooling includes various officer courses, CAS(cubed) training, and the

like. The problem is aggrevated for those officers who must backtrack to take officer courses already completed by younger officers or, in many cases in the Guard, who must acquire civilian bachelor's and advanced degrees for promotion considerations. The difficulties for reservists -- whether NCO or officer -- with regular civilian employment to find the time to take such career development courses are almost insurmountable.

The double bind affects those who have the most demanding civilian jobs, especially if these demands are part of an upward career movement in civilian life. Typical reponses from reserve officers in such positions follow. "There comes a time when you have to decide which way to go [in or out of the reserves]." "It really gets tough." "I have to simplify my life." "There is no answer." For such individuals, and they are often those with the most promise as future senior officers, time not money is the key variable.

Even if a reservist does somehow find the time to attend a military school or devote extra time to his unit, he may find his civilian work situation suffers correspondingly. Reserve membership can too often be a negative factor in one's civilian career. Obtaining time off for annual training alone may cause employer resentment. As it is, the extra work required of career officers is already reflected in the increasing turndowns of company and battalion command positions.

Because of this double bind, career NCOs and officers in the reserves are increasingly likely to come from a narrow band of civilian backgrounds: (1)large-scale organizations responsible to reserve obligations, (2) those who have reached a plateau in their civilian work, (3) those with undemanding work, and (4) those who are underemployed. The career force in the reserves is overrepresented with government workers, school teachers, and the self-employed in marginal businesses. Largely missing from the officer corps of the reserves is the truly succesful business executive or professional. Also the view is widespread that there are fewer individuals of independent wealth in the reserve hierarchy than in times past. Certainly, a succesful corporate or professional career is not a prerequisite for exemplary officership, but the elan and quality of the reserves would most likely be bolstered if more, as one active-duty advisor put it, "success stories" were in visible reserve positions.

Perhaps the point can be illustrated by way of an individual vignette. A successful executive that I met in annual training reported that he had his civilian office work sent to the camp by Federal Express so he could work on it during his spare time while in the field! It was impossible for him to leave his desk for a two-week stretch. Even to his superior back home, he understated the extra time he devoted to the reserves, lest he jeoparidize his promotion within the company.

Reserve Duty and Family Conflict. Conflict between family

responsibilities and military duty is almost expected. The differences in family conflict between reserve and active components are noteworthy, nevertheless. In general terms, military/family conflict in the active forces is likely to be most severe at junior levels than at senior levels. That is, coping processes and self-selection work toward reducing family conflict as career members advance through the system. In the reserves the situation is almost the opposite. Time demands beyond the statutory 39 days are minimal for junior personnel, but become increasingly pronounced for career reservists. Thus, family conflict heightens rather than attentuates as one moves up the reserve career ladder.

Though my interviews generally revealed family conflict to be clearly second to employer conflict, there is an interrelation between the two forms of conflict. It seems that when the double bind with the employer occurs, family conflict comes to the fore as well. When employer conflict already exists, that is, family conflict seems to be aggrevated. The reservist caught between military demands and civilian job pressures is truly the individual who has little free time for his family.

Another difference between reserve and active forces with regard to military/family relations requires special comment. In the reserves, military/family conflicts mus be worked out within individual family units, as there is little interaction between reserve spouses or families. In the active force, many of these

military/family conflicts are shared experiences because much of family life is centered or revolves around the military post. Unlike what occurs among wives of active-duty members, networking among wives of reservists is relatively uncommon. (There is the perhaps apocryphal story of the wife of a Guardsman who did not know her husband received compensation until she met another wife at a Guard social function.)

Family conflict in the reserves must be put in perspective, however. A general rule seems to be: "When soldiers like the reserves, the family likes the reserves." We should not lose sight of the fact the reserve duty can also buttress the famly, especially for those who do not have demanding civilian work. For unemployed and underemployed reservists, the extra cash is a welcome addition to family income. We should also keep in mind that for many reservists annual training is, as one reservist put it, "an honorable way to get away from the wife." Or as another said: "It gets both of us out a rut and makes for a second honeymoon when I come home."

Full-Timers in the Reserves. A critical element in the readiness of the reserves is the personnel that provides full-time support for unit training. In addition to civilian support staff, there are full-time military members in reserve forces who are responsible for administering, recruiting, instructing, training, and maintenance in their unit. These military members, in most cases, would deploy with their reserve

unit in the event of mobilization. Full-time auxilliary military members of reserve units consist of three categories: (1) Active Guard/Reserve (AGR) are Guard or Reserve members of the Selected Reserve who are ordered to active duty or full-time National Guard duty with their consent; (2) Military Technicians are federal civilian employees who provide full-time support while maintaining their status as drilling reservists in the same unit; and (3) Active Duty Advisors are active duty members assigned to the unit (though not part of the Selected Reserve).

This almost baroque structure of full-time membership in reserve components makes for a significant difference with active-duty forces. Ultimately, reserve readiness is a function of the number of full-timers present in reserve units. One outcome of the "Total Force" concept and the resultant policy to make reserve components more equivalent to the active force has been the growing number of full-timers assigned to reserve units. These auxilliary full-time members have no counterpart in active-duty force structure.

Less visible as a reserve social category than any of the above is what might be termed the "professional reservist" (or maybe "part-time professional"). Such individual form an increasingly important factor in the calculus of unit readiness. These are reservists who manage to patch together scores of days on reserve duty, much of it compensated, beyond the normal 39-day requirement. (I ran into one individual who had accumulated 109

extra days of paid reserve time in the past year.) Such "professional reservists" are often individuals subject to adjustable work calendars, long layoffs in their civilian jobs, or underemployment.

Field interviews suggest that if an AGR program were offered whereby members could remain in their home locales, a large fraction of career reservists who fall into this "professional reservist" category would take such an option even if not offered on a full-time basis. This to say that there is a definite category of potential reservists somewhere between the proverbial "weekend warrior" and the full-time auxilliary. The possibility of a part-time and locally based AGR is worth exploring as it offers a way of improving unit readiness without the costs encounted with full-time auxilliary members.

Military Social Organization: Active versus Reserve Components. No typology can be so neat as to do justice to the complexities of social realities. But the distinction between the sociology of reserve forces and the sociology of active forces is a real one. On the basis of the findings given in this report, we are in a position to present a preliminary assessment of the key social organizational distinctions between active components and reserve components. These are given in Chart 1.

[Chart 1 About Here]

Chart 1. MILITARY SOCIAL ORGANIZATION: ACTIVE VS. RESERVE COMPONENTS

Variable	Active Components	Reserve Components
Training Time	Year-round	One weekend a month plus two-weeks annual training (aprx 1/5 of total time for actives)
Geographical Setting	Administration concentrated on post	Administration dispersed over large regional area
Residence	Many on post, most others nearby	None on post, many coming from long distances
Recruitment	Mostly non-prior service	Half prior-service, half non-prior service
Recruitment Incentives	"Dual Market," majority job-oriented, minority college-bound	Majority college-bound, minority job-oriented
Retention Incentives	Career benefits, especially salary; retirement pension	Extra dimension in life cycle; retirement pension
First-Term Attrition	2/3 complete normal 3-year enlistment	1/5 complete normal 6-year enlistment
Employer Conflict	Not applicable	Moderate for junior personnel; Severe for senior personnel
Family Conflict	Moderate for all though less for seniors	Moderate for all though more for seniors
Military Spouses	Much networking	Little networking
Career Development	Structured and desired; little conflict with personal life	Unstructured and ambiguous; severe conflict with personal life
Role of Auxiliary Military Members	Not applicable	Central to management of unit

These distinctions are not to be mechanically applied and may require, upon further examination, conceptual modification. But even this provisional level of abstraction is a long step toward conceptualization the sociology of reserve forces. That this typology has been reviewed and commented upon by independent sources in the senior levels of the Army reserve command community may speak to its utility. Most important, the typology of variables presented in Chart 1 allows for a grounded basis for policy recommendations and future research directions.

Researchable Propositions and Food For Thought

Research Issues. Several of the issues covered in this report are amenable to more quantifiable and systematic research. The most salient are described here.

1. How many present career reservists would shift to a permanent part-time st..us along the lines of the "professional reservist" discussed above?

2. To what degree does greater reliance on full-timers truly reduce housekeeping and record keeping chores and thereby allow reservists more real time for training?

3. Are the training demands to bring reserve components up to active standards causing an increasingly taut organization? And, if so, is this more likely to reduce the retention of excpetional individuals who have successful but demanding civilian careers?

4. Can a special control group of officers be established who can step out of reserve duty during periods of special demands in their civilian careers and then allowed the option of later reentry into drilling units?

5. What are the cost trade-offs between assigning prior-service enlisted members with extensive technical training to local units with mismatched MOS's (the present system) as compared to special annual training or long-weekends at the branch school of their MOS (most likely entailing airfare and special orders)?

6. How much can be done to repackage military schools for reserve members in reserve terms? One has in mind weekend courses, correspondence courses, two-week courses during annual training, course taught by circuit instructors, condensing existing active-duty courses, and so forth.

7. Can a special reserve status be created that meshes with college/vocational training whereby selected individuals could alternate between normal reserve duty and quarters or semesters at either civilian or military schools for technicial training.

Items #5, #6, and #7 deal with what is probably the most severe training challenge confronting the reserves -- how will reservists learn to handle the new generation of sophisticated weaponry now entering the arsenal of the American Army.

Food for Thought.. The weakest link in reserve training is generally recognized as being found in the interaction between

echelons and horizontal communication between units. This is precisely the training most difficult to accomplish in a weekend-drill setting. Reserve forces may have to move into sophisticated -- and admittedly expensive -- simulators to aid individual MOS training. Likewise, costly wargaming computers are required to allow realistic CPX's in drill sessions. What trade-offs in the defense budget would be required to bring such training innovations to reserve units?

The likelihood of stagnant NCOs and officers appears to be greater in reserve than active components. Some senior people have "stacked arms" waiting for the twenty-year retirement point. Serious consideration should be given to "buying out" such individuals. One plan could be to offer a retirement rate prorated for the number of years served. An NCO with 15 years of service, that is, would receive at age sixty three-quarters of the regular retirement benefit for reservists. Such a step would be far-reaching and would require Congressional action. But if reserve components are truly to be brought up to active-duty standards, this may be the most practical way to unclog career advancement.

Reserve components are not well understood in the society at large. Reserve forces need strong advocacy at the national level, including presidential and congressional presentation of their role in national security. That 1988 will see the number of soldiers in the Selected Reserve exceed those in the active

components is a change of historic significance; yet it will occur with little public awareness of its ramifications. There is a more immediate problem as well, however. Reserve components are not all that well understood by the active military. One way to promote such understanding is through visible promotions of active-duty personnel who have served in reserve components. Other mechanisms might be setting up familiarization tours in reserve components through TDYs and making such TDYS a variable in active-duty promotions.

Conclusion. This report has sought to demonstrate that the researchers and policy makers ought be alert to the differences as well as similarities between active and reserve forces. The basic research given here promises not so much solutions to specific problems, but some useful ways to think about them. The purpose of basic research in the social sciences is not to provide policy prescriptions, but to furnish information that can be used in evauating the adequacy of current military manpower policies and, where needed, undertaking new policy initiatives.

This report, the second in a larger study of the sociology of reserve forces, has presented findings based upon in-depth interviews with reservists and extended observations of reserve units. An earlier report documented demographic, social background, and attitudinal differences between members of reserve forces and active-duty forces. <11> The third report will highlight organizational features in the American reserve

system by making international comparisons with reserve forces of other Western nations. The final technical report will be based on the three research reports and specify the implications of the sociology of reserve forces for policy. In sum, the sociology of the reserves is a subject that is worthy of study in its own right and that should be approached on its own terms.

NOTES

1. Most of the writings on the military reserves have been historical accounts. For recent works and current bibliographies, see Bennie J. Wilson III, ed., The Guard and Reserve in the Total Force (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1985; John K. Mahon, History of the Militia and the National Guard, (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1983; and Richard B. Crossland and James T. Currie, Twice the Citizen: A History of the U.S. Army Reserve, 1908-1983, (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief, Army Reserve, 1984). A comprenhsive but now dated bibliography is Thomas C. Wyatt, "Sociology of the Military Reserves," unpublished paper, November, 1978.

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